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THE ART UNION

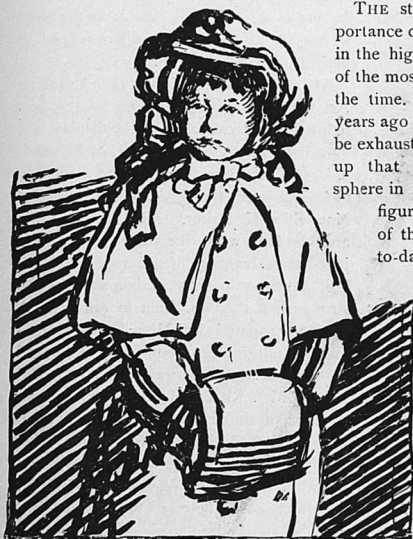
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WOMEN WHO PAINT.



MISS S. H. MCDOWELL.

THE steadily increasing importance of woman as a worker in the higher fields of art is one of the most encouraging signs of the time. It is not so many years ago that the fingers would be exhausted in summing them up that the highest artistic sphere in which the gentler sex figured was not above that of the average amateur of to-day. Her talent exhausted itself in the creation of petty prettinesses, without vitality or significance, and her achievements were crowned with the most splendid success when they won an obscure corner for themselves in an exhibition hall. The mere fact that a picture was painted by a woman was suffi-

cient to warrant its dismissal with a glance and a shrug. Its maternity rendered it beneath criticism.

Nor was this to be wondered at, all things considered. Art as anything nobler than the relaxation of an idle hour did not exist for the American woman. Even the comparatively meagre opportunities the man enjoyed were denied her. She learned drawing and painting as polite accomplishments from incompetent teachers, and practiced them, as she did her piano or her embroidery, to while the time away. With neither aid nor

encouragement, without liberty to expand or room to expand in, the most charming talents were crushed, and the most vigorous and determined ones grew up weak and distorted, incapable of doing justice to themselves or of giving expression to their inspirations. The writer well recalls how, not more than twenty-five years ago, the appearance of a young lady student in the antique room of the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts created such a sensation among the male students that the curator had to exercise his authority to restrain their exuberant amazement. When, a few years later, a life class for women was begun, it almost created a riot. To the



MISS SARAH P. B. DODSON.



MISS ROSINA EMMET.

Academy of Fine Arts, and to the School of Design for Women in the same city, belong all honor for first breaking down the barrier which is now quite swept away.

The story of her emancipation in New York is almost a romance. In the winter of 1871-2, the battle was fought in the councils of the National Academy of Design. That genial, liberal-minded old man on Staten Island, now withdrawn from an active career, but whose services to art should always be remembered, William Page, was then President of the Academy, with the active co-operation of various members of the Council, notably of Mr. E. Wood Perry, Mr. John La Farge, Mr. S. J. Guy and Mr. J. Q. A. Ward, and against equally active opposition, the first life class for women was started. Among those who first availed themselves of its advantages were Mrs. Susan N. Carter, Mrs. R. W. Gilder, the two Miss Granberys, Mrs. T. W. Dewing and Miss Cora Richardson. The

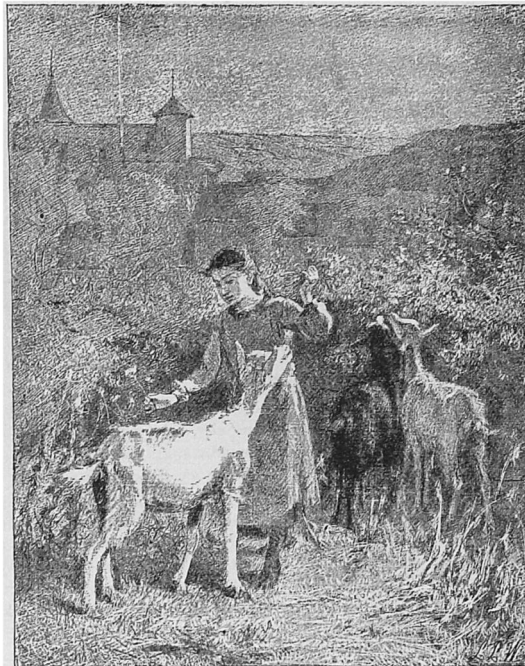
class was carried on during the year, but the next year was discontinued. The ostensible reason, and in some measure the real reason, was lack of funds. But in any case the want of sufficient money was an excuse that readily served. Even Academicians held that the propriety of woman studying from the life was debatable. There was, moreover, a large contingent of patrons outside, that in all innovation, including Sunday opening of exhibitions, held conservative ground, and their opinion was to be respected. This apparent withdrawal of the opportunity of studying from the life led to the formation of the Art Students' League, one of the most valuable artistic influences still in this city. These summary measures inevitably had some effect in the re-establishment of the schools of the Academy of Design with increased advantages.

There is no artistic centre in Europe that offers so many advantages to women studying art as this city. The recent changes in the Art Students' League classes have been chiefly in their favor. The organization in its construction has always illustrated an ideal equality. Nothing could be more generous or chivalrous than the conduct of the young men who have been interested in the League toward the young women, their co-workers. Ever since a handful of students found themselves shut out of the schools of the National Academy of Design, and in self-defense formed the Art Students' League, its prosperity has been due to the *esprit de corps* which distinguished those early days. The women students have always had equal share in the government of the school, and to-day, of the ten members of the Board of Control, four are women, one of whom is the Vice-president. The recent change in classes has been from the afternoon to the morning. This change gives women students who study from the life nine and a half hours a day, a time far in excess of the hours given to women in foreign art schools, where rarely more than four hours are allotted to the sex.

Woman now enjoys most of the advantages for art study which are afforded to man. The same lessons the schools impart to him belong to her, and the same masters whose experience and judgment guide him on the way are enlisted in her service too. In the march of progress to which it has awakened of late years, American art has reached a hand out to its children irrespective of sex, and put them each in the place of honor he or she has deserved. The painter alone does not absorb the credit of the exhibition of to-day. His sister of the palette claims her share of its rewards. With every



MISS ALICE BARBER.



MRS. L. L. WILLIAMS.

recurring display of pictures we note her presence in added numbers and in greater power. The age of flower painting is past for her, or when she does paint them, as Miss Eleanor Greatorex does, it is with the bold hand of a master, not the timorous littleness of a child. A painter of academic and historical compositions, like Miss Sarah P. B. Dodson, would a decade or so ago have been regarded as a violation of all the rules of sex, just as *Rosa Bonheur* was for many years. Now she is as germane to our art as any man who has helped to build it up.

At the Prize Exhibition at the American Art Galleries last spring, one of the best painted figure canvases in the display was by a lady, Miss Cecelia Beaux, of Philadelphia. Little less forceful and strong in technique were the figure compositions of Mrs. Ellen K. Baker. Miss Amelia Lotz, another lady who, like these two, had enjoyed the advantage of a European schooling, shone conspicuous among some of the strongest of the new men in our art. A decorative panel by Miss Dodson commanded admiration from every critic and connoisseur. A large and ambitious canvas, by Mrs. Rhoda Holmes Nicholls, was another of the works of note from feminine hands. A couple of truly remarkable smaller canvases were those contributed by Mrs. Sarah W. Whitman, of Boston. In every case these pictures were surrounded by the best work of artists of conceded eminence, and in no case did they suffer by the contrast.

The Academy of Design's exhibitions are always rich in the best work of our women painters. The stately academic compositions of Miss Dodson have been an annual feature of its displays for some years past. Miss Rosina Emmet's vigorous and progressive talent annually records its advance on the same walls. Miss Jennie Browncombe, of Honesdale, Pa., sends here pictures which, for honest study, serious execution and the best qualities of feeling and sound technique, rank among the most important by the younger generation of our painters. The charming out-door effects of Mrs. N. S. J. Smillie, the unostentatious, but none the less admirable, domestic studies of Mrs. Helen C. Hovenden, and the works of Miss Alice Barber, of Philadelphia, and Miss C. W. Conant, of Brooklyn, have also become part of the regular contributions to our spring Salon.

THE ART UNION does not pretend to do full justice to the gentler sex in art in this necessarily brief sketch. The list of candidates for honorable mention would tax our restricted space too severely just now. A mere recapitulation of the deserving names would in

itself be a formidable list. Among the other ladies whose works have during the past couple of seasons attracted and deserved special attention at our exhibitions, we can now recall Mrs. L. L. Williams, of Boston; Miss Georgina Campbell, a Louisiana girl, who is now located in New York; Mrs. Emma Lowstadt Chadwick, who is, we believe, a Swede, married to an American artist, and resident with him in Paris; Miss Mary Kollock, of Norfolk, Va., whom A. H. Wyant claims as a pupil; Miss Kate Greatorex, in whom the talents of her mother and sister are reflected; Miss Dora Wheeler; Mrs. Elizabeth Boott, of Boston, an extremely strong painter in portraiture of children, and a new and remarkably vital talent in Miss Ida Bothe, also, we believe, of Boston. Susan H. Macdowell is a Philadelphian and a pupil of Professor Eakins, who does her master as well as herself credit. Miss Elizabeth J. Gardner sends annually from Paris canvases of a size and quality which render them exceptionally



MRS. N. S. JACOBS SMILLIE.



MRS. EMMA L. CHADWICK.

noteworthy. Of the sterling work of Mrs. Anna Lea Merritt, now residing in London, too much has already been written to render detailed praise necessary here.

A SCULPTOR'S OPINIONS.

LONDON, 12th September, 1885.

IN a dark and joyless avenue, leading from the Fulham Road to nowhere, is the studio of J. G. Boehm, R.A., a sculptor of great repute and a man of strong feeling for the truth in art. A lover of horse flesh, as becomes a Hungarian, his superb life-size "King Tom," the mighty son of Pocahontas, who "ought" to have won the Derby, but did not, made his reputation as a sculptor of animals. In addition to horses Mr. Boehm delights to model lions and dogs. A thorough realist, he scoffs at the faun and derides the satyr as the dream of a drunkard. Yet, despite this strong feeling for truth, his propensities have made him weak on the subject of the centaur, for he avers that the centaur, a creature of beauty, grace and power, was a splendid

ideal of the Greek brain at its best, and "ought" to have existed. Fresh from a trip to Italy, the artist finds ample food for admiration in the superb portrait sculpture of the early renaissance, in which the men were carved in feature and habit as they lived, not turned into sham Romans and Greeks, like the queer "sculps," lurking about the squares of London, of hatless equestrians, and centurions of the Queen Anne period. Speaking of Carlyle, he declares that he was the "most delightful of all possible companions," and a sitter after his own heart, thoroughly enjoying the uncompromising truth of the celebrated statue, one of the sculptor's best known works. "It is impossible," exclaims Mr. Boehm, with all the vivacity and candor of his native land, "to look upon the work of Verocchio and Houdon, the suburb equestrian Coleone, the statue of Voltaire, and the bust of Houdon, without recognizing how those artists tower above the blundering slaves of convention and strivers after prettiness, according to the idea, not of Pheidias, but of the debased antique period, when art had sunk into imitative manufacture, and manual dexterity lagged on long after the soul had departed. Verocchio's Boy with a Dolphin in the Signoria at Florence is also unique in its way; but the Coleone is probably the finest bronze work in the world. To all who know these truly great achievements the performances of Canova and Gibson must appear ridiculous. Where are we to suppose the first Napoleon to have been when Canova modeled him? On the frozen snow-plains of Russia or the scorching sands of Egypt? The chances are in favor of the latter; for the Corsican warrior is stark naked, protected only from the sun and the foe by a Greek helmet and a Roman sword! How absurd is this when compared with the



MRS. HELEN C. HOVENDEN,